

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON LEBANESE SITUATION

FOR AMBASSADOR

1. LEBANESE SITUATION MAY BE ENTERING OMINOUS STAGE
BECAUSE OF FOLLOWING SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS:

2. KARAME RESIGNATION. MOSLEM PRIME MINISTER KARAME, WHO
RESIGNED JAN 18, HAD BEEN LEADING VOICE AMONG MODERATE
MOSLEMS FOR RECONCILIATION AND COMPROMISE IN LEBANON. HIS

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RESIGNATION, IF NOT WITHDRAWN, IS LIKELY TO HARDEN CON-

FESSIONAL LINES AND POLARIZE SITUATION FURTHER. AT MOMENT
WE SEE NO OTHER PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE FOR PREMIER WHO COULD
MATCH HIS PRESTIGE, AUTHORITY, AND DETERMINATION.

3. FIGHTING AT HIGH INTENSITY. IN PAST TWO WEEKS FIGHTING
HAS ESCALATED TOWARD VIRTUAL CIVIL WAR. LATEST PHASE BEGAN
WHEN CHRISTIANS BLOCKADED PALESTINIAN
CAMPS IN EAST BEIRUT, WHICH ARE ASTRIDE MAIN ROAD FROM
BEIRUT TO CHRISTIAN MOUNTAIN SUBURBS. PALESTINIAN FEDAYEEN
AND THEIR LEBANESE LEFTIST ALLIES, UNABLE TO BREAK BLOCKADE,
HAVE LAUNCHED ATTACKS AGAINST CHRISTIAN STRONGHOLDS
THROUGHOUT BEIRUT AREA AND IN VARIOUS OTHER PARTS OF
COUNTRY. HEAVIEST FIGHTING IN RECENT DAYS HAS BEEN
PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST ATTACK ON ISOLATED CHRISTIAN ENCLAVE
AROUND DAMOUR (SOUTH OF BEIRUT), AND CHRISTIAN PHALANGIST
EFFORT TO SEIZE MOSLEM QUARTER OF QARANTINA IN EAST
BEIRUT.

4. SEEMING MOVES TOWARD PARTITION. ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN
BLOCKADE OF CAMPS IN EAST BEIRUT, AND RECENT ATTACKS ON
QARANTINA, APPEAR HAVE AS MAXIMUM GOAL REMOVAL OF ALL
PALESTINIANS FROM THESE ENCLAVES. EVEN PARTIAL SUCCESS
IN THIS OBJECTIVE WOULD BE MAJOR STEP TOWARD DE FACTO
PARTITION, SINCE IT WOULD PUT CHRISTIANS IN CONTROL OF
CONTIGUOUS AREA COMPRISING HEART OF CHRISTIAN MOUNT
LEBANON AND PORT AND CHRISTIAN QUARTERS OF BEIRUT. EXTENT
AND INTENSITY OF FIGHTING IS ALSO PROVIDING IMPETUS TOWARD
DE FACTO DIVISION OF COUNTRY AS LINES BETWEEN CHRISTIAN
AND MOSLEM/PALESTINIAN AREAS BECOME EVER MORE CLEARLY
DRAWN AND MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS FINDING THEMSELVES ON
WRONG SIDE OF LINE TEND TO MOVE FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY.

5. GROWING ARMY INVOLVEMENT. ARMY HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY
INVOLVED IN SUPPORT OF CHRISTIANS IN MANY AREAS. EXAMPLE
WAS USE OF AIR FORCE FOR FIRST TIME SINCE TROUBLES
BEGAN IN JANUARY 16 EFFORT TO EXTRICATE ARMY COLUMN
ASSISTING CHRISTIANS IN DAMOUR AREA. ALTHOUGH ARMY
LEADERSHIP APPARENTLY IS TRYING TO AVOID MORE EXTENSIVE
INVOLVEMENT, WHAT HAS OCCURRED MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO
KARAME'S RESIGNATION, ADDS TO GENERAL HARDENING OF
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CONFESSIONAL LINES, AND THUS INCREASES POTENTIAL FOR
SPLIT INTO TWO LEBANONS.

6. PALESTINIAN PRESTIGE AND CREDIBILITY AT STAKE. UNTIL
EARLY JANUARY, LEADING PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS (PLO/
FATAH/SAIQA) HAD HELD BACK FROM TOTAL INVOLVEMENT IN LEB-
ANESE FIGHTING AND COMMITMENT OF MAIN FORCE FEDAYEEN UNITS.
MAJOR UPSURGE IN PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT HAS OCCURRED IN

RESPONSE TO RECENT CHRISTIAN MOVES. PLO/SAIQA/FATAH NOW ADMIT PUBLICLY, FOR VIRTUALLY FIRST TIME, THEY ARE IN FOREFRONT OF FIGHTING, THEREBY PUTTING THEIR PRESTIGE AND MILITARY CREDIBILITY AT STAKE. THERE ARE SIGNS THAT PALESTINIANS ARE IN PROCESS CONSIDERING AND PERHAPS MOVING TO ALL-OUT INVOLVEMENT, IF NOT NOW, THEN AFTER UNSC DEBATE. ARAFAT MAY BE FACING A PROBLEM OF CONTROLLING HIS MORE MILITANT SUPPORTERS. SIGNS INCLUDE REPORTS OF INFLOW OF PALESTINIAN UNITS WITH HEAVY WEAPONS FROM SYRIA.

COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT APPEAR AT DEAD HALT. IN LATE DECEMBER SYRIANS, AS PART OF MEDIATION EFFORT, PREPARED FIVE-POINT PROGRAM DESIGNED TO PROVIDE POLITICAL BASIS FOR MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION AND RETURN TO STABILITY. POINTS WERE: (A) EQUAL CHRISTIAN/MUSLIM REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT, INSTEAD OF PRESENT 55/44 DIVISION; (B) HAVING THE PREMIER NOMINATED BY A SIMPLE MAJORITY OF THE REFORMED PARLIAMENT AND APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT (THIS WOULD AMOUNT TO PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF THE PREMIER); (C) ELIMINATION OF CONFESSIONAL RESTRICTIONS ON SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE POSTS; (D) CREATION OF A COUNCIL TO OVERSEE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS; (E) ESTABLISHMENT OF A HIGH (CONSTITUTIONAL) COURT. MARONITE CHRISTIAN LEADERS (FRANGIE, GEMAYEL, CHAMOUN) ON DECEMBER 31 REJECTED THIS COMPROMISE PROPOSAL, SPECIFICALLY POINTS A AND B, WHICH HAD UNTIL THEN SEEMED TO PROVIDE REASONABLE BASIS FOR EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE COMPROMISE ON DOMESTIC LEBANESE POLITICAL ISSUES INVOLVED. SINCE THEN THERE HAS BEEN NO PROGRESS TOWARD COMPROMISE, AND ATTEMPT TO ARRANGE MEETING BETWEEN LEBANESE PRESIDENT FRANGIE AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD THUS FAR UNSUCCESSFUL. APPEALS BY OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS AND THE ARAB LEAGUE FOR SUMMIT MEETINGS OR OTHER INTER-ARAB CONCILIATION EFFORTS SO FAR APPEAR TO BE NON-SECRET

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STARTERS, IN PART BECAUSE OF EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN RIVALRY.

7. RISKS OF SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTERVENTION. ANY MOVE TOWARD PARTITION OR DE FACTO PARTITION AROUSES SYRIAN CONCERN. SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM TOLD KUWAITI PRESS THAT SYRIA MIGHT INTERVENE AND ANNEX LEBANON TO FORESTALL PARTITION. THIS SPARKED STATEMENTS BY ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER PERES AND PRIME MINISTER RABIN TO EFFECT THAT ISRAEL COULD NOT TOLERATE SYRIAN INTERVENTION. SISCO

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